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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN NUGGETS -- DECEMBER 11, 2009

REF: ABUJA 2198 AND PREVIOUS

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1. (U) Mission Nigeria provides the following compilation of recent political, economic, and social developments not previously reported.

PDP POLITICIANS NABBED IN EDO BY-ELECTION

2. (SBU) Edo State politicians and local citizens caught Senator Gbenga Oguniya and two federal legislators, from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), in the act of stealing and stuffing ballot boxes during the December 5 by-election to fill a House of Representatives seat in Ondo State's Akoko South West-South East federal constituency. Oguniya, accompanied by thugs posing as police officers, sought to intimidate voters and conduct "private in-house voting" where PDP partisans would stuff ballot boxes with illegitimate votes, according to Embassy contacts and the press. Police temporarily detained the PDP legislators after an angry crowd appeared. Jonathan Mark, the son of Senate President David Mark (PDP), initially confirmed to PolOff December 7 the Senator's detention by police. Presidential Special Advisor for Civil Society Relations Chineme Ume-Ezeoke lamented the incident to PolCouns and PolMil Specialist December 8, describing it as "law-maker turned law-breaker." He added that "every family has its Judas."

3. (SBU) The Independent National Election Commission (INEC) acted quickly by rejecting 4,093 illegitimate votes in the election, which opposition Labor Party candidate Debo Ologunagba won with 18,155 votes, followed by PDP candidate Jimmy Adedapo with 9,960 votes, and Action Congress candidate Tunde Eniola with 730 votes.

INEC-APPOINTED BOARD FOR ANAMBRA

4. (SBU) INEC appointed a ten-member Election Monitoring and Observation Board for the February 6, 2010, Anambra gubernatorial election, according to December 8 media reports. The advisory board will reportedly identify issues affecting the conduct and credibility of the electoral process and propose actions to INEC on institutional, procedural, and other issues to improve the electoral

process. Some board members include avowed critics of INEC, both as an institution and in the quality of its leadership. Some pushed for electoral reforms and even called for the Chairperson's resignation after the 2007 elections. This is the first time that INEC has appointed a monitoring and observation board for an election.

BAFARAWA ARRESTED AT "MEGA" PARTY MEETING

15. (SBU) Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) officials arrested former Sokoto Governor Attahiru Dalhatu Bafarawa December 9 for alleged embezzlement of state funds while attending a National Democratic Movement (NDM) meeting to plan a "mega" opposition party. Speaking to PolOff within an hour of the arrest, Buhari Campaign Organizer Buba Galadima criticized Bafarawa's arrest as the latest example of Nigerian Government (GON) intimidation of the opposition and an attempt at "poaching its membership." Similarly, Publicity Director Hamisu Santuraki publicly characterized the arrest as "intended to create jitters in the growing camp of those calling for genuine and legitimate change in the country."

16. (SBU) Former Governor Bafarawa told PolCouns and PolSpec October 27 that he possessed documents proving that he had left a sizable treasury surplus -- 11.8 billion naira (about 80 million U.S. dollars) -- for his successor in the Sokoto statehouse in 2007. At the time, he described the allegations against him as untrue and part of a political vendetta by current Sokoto Governor Aliyu Wamakko of the ruling PDP. He noted EFCC attempts to intimidate him by holding him for questioning and retaining his passport to restrict his travels. He noted that he had obtained a court order to force EFCC officials to return his passport.

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GON COMMITTED TO ELECTRONIC PAYMENTS

17. (SBU) The Nigerian Government plans to retain a newly-instituted system of electronic payments, according to the December 9 edition of "This Day." Rumors had circulated that GON officials would revert to using checks and cash to pay for public services because of delays in payments caused by the new system, which has elicited criticism in some quarters since its introduction earlier this year to reduce theft of funds earmarked for salaries, contract payments, and other public services. Presidential Advisor for Relations with Civil Society Ume-Ezeoke cited this system to PolCouns and PolMil Specialist December 8 as a measure the GON had instituted to curb corruption by replacing cash payments, susceptible to inclusion of bribes, with electronic ones. Separately, Petroleum Ministry Resources Chief Don Etiebet acknowledged to ConGen Officer that the new system needed safeguards to ensure integrity of the transmitted data and the credibility of persons implementing the payments.

HOUSE TAKES UP BIOSAFETY LAW

18. (SBU) The House of Representatives Agriculture Committee convened a public hearing December 9 on a draft biosafety bill to discuss shortcomings and possible solutions. Suggestions included empowering the Consumer Protection Council to protect the public from any adverse effects of genetically modified organisms, training lawyers on the biosafety legislation provisions after approval, incorporating penalties for improper application of a biotechnology license, incorporating safety recommendations from the Ministry of Health, and authorizing the

Biotechnology Development Agency to enforce the bill rather than creating a new entity to do so. The Committee planned to deliberate on these recommendations and forward the bill to the House for its consideration in early 2010.

MISSION WORLD AIDS DAY HEALTH FAIR

¶9. (U) The Embassy's PEPFAR Office and Health Unit held a Mission World AIDS Day Health Fair at the Chancery December 9 to sensitize all Mission community members on HIV prevention, income generation for women, clean water for health, and nutrition for People Living With HIV-AIDS. About ten PEPFAR implementing partners participated, showcasing their programs and selling medical commodities, including insecticide-treated bed nets. They provided various items free of charge, including water purification chemicals, nutritional supplements, and prophylactics. The fair included a blood drive administered by the Nigerian National Blood Transfusion Service, which attracted over 20 donors.

INFLUENZA WORKSHOP

¶10. (U) The Africa Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO), with USAID support, recently organized a five-day workshop in Abuja to help countries develop Vaccination Deployment Plans. Workshop organizers informed and described implementation and planning activities that each government can undertake to deliver the Pandemic Influenza A (H1N1) vaccine promptly, effectively, and efficiently to protect their citizens. GON, WHO, and USAID officials developed a draft plan, which they presented during the workshop's plenary session.

¶11. (U) Embassy Abuja and ConGen Lagos collaborated on this telegram.
SANDERS